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ABSTRACT

Documented volunteer experience can be a valuable tool for the individual who volunteers as well as for the organization for which the volunteer works. Current trends point toward the heightened need for validating volunteer experience. Recordkeeping systems can help facilitate effective placement of all volunteers according to their interests, skills, and available time. The process of documentation often develops greater consciousness on the part of the volunteer about his or her marketable skills and areas of personal growth (such as increased risk taking). Volunteer training records can be a vehicle for developing and monitoring individual career or training plans and can be a source of information for writing resumes or responding to requests for references. Volunteer leaders have an advocacy role that extends beyond the volunteer program itself to interaction with potential employers of volunteers and representatives of academic institutions evaluating volunteers' competencies. Volunteer leaders must therefore keep time records and job descriptions for individual volunteers, determine methods of creating individual training plans, and identify and implement schedules for volunteer performance evaluation. (MN)

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VOLUNTEER FOR MINNESOTA

DOCUMENTING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

VOLUNTEER FOR MINNESOTA: A Project for Developing Public Private Partnerships in Communities

CE 051 857

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DOCUMENTING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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DOCUMENTING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

MONOGRAPH

Documented volunteer experience can be a valuable tool for the individual who volunteers, as well as the organization for which he/she volunteers. When recruiting volunteers, organizations known for taking initiative in offering the opportunity for volunteers to document their contributions and accomplishments, may find that they have a competitive edge over those organizations which do not. Expectations for organizations to assist in documenting volunteer experience are growing.

The following questions come to mind when making decisions about documenting volunteer experience:

* Why is it worthwhile for organizations to document volunteer experience?
* What impact can volunteer records have on the individual volunteer?
* What is the value of volunteer records for the organization and its clientele?
* How does an organization go about establishing or encouraging systems for keeping and verifying volunteer records?
* Whose responsibility is it to keep records -- the individual's or the organization's?
* What resources are available to help organizations with this process?

Current trends point toward the heightened need for validating volunteer experience. The motivations for people to volunteer are expanding. Traditionally people have volunteered in order to provide a needed and valued community service. Today more individuals are also aware of their personal needs or interests which might be nurtured or satisfied through volunteer experience.

The emphasis on documenting volunteer experience partially has been an outgrowth of the women's movement. More women are seeking paid employment and see volunteerism as an avenue toward future employment. Women who choose not to seek paid employment often view volunteerism as a way to pro-

vide a meaningful contribution to society while continuing to strengthen their own skills and accomplish personal growth. In addition, economic conditions have led to higher unemployment for persons of all backgrounds. Therefore, greater numbers of unemployed persons participate in the volunteer work force who are likely to be concerned with career development and re-entry into the paid labor force. Some employed persons realize that volunteer activities may be a way to improve job performance or build qualifications for career advancement by expanding skills, developing new competencies, or functioning in new roles. Also, students may use volunteer experience to gain entry into the job market.

Recordkeeping systems can help to facilitate effective placement of all volunteers according to their interests, skills, and available time. People usually expect to volunteer in relevant and worthwhile jobs, appreciate appropriate opportunities for advancement in volunteer positions and want to be involved in planning and decision-making which is related to their volunteer activities. Documenting volunteer experience can be invaluable in attaining these objectives.

The specific impact of documenting volunteer experience varies significantly from volunteer to volunteer. A number of possible outcomes can result from having accurate records of volunteer work. Some of these outcomes include verification of volunteer-related training and experience which might be evaluated by educational institutions for entrance consideration or academic credit, or by employers as they select or promote employees. The process of documentation often develops greater consciousness on the part of the volunteer about his/her marketable skills and areas of personal growth, such as, increased risk-taking. A more confident willingness to take on added responsibilities or meet new challenges may surface as the volunteer experiences objective evidence of his/her competence. In addition, volunteer training records can be a vehicle for the development and monitoring of individual career or training plans and can be a source of information when writing resume's or responding to requests for references.

In many cases, insurance companies will examine volunteer records when determining the merits of an insurance claim. While documenting volunteer experience affords personal benefits to the volunteer, keeping detailed volunteer records will assist an organization to conduct its business more efficiently. The ability to quickly retrieve statistical data, such as

volunteer service and training hours, number of people affected by volunteer services, and volunteer expenses, will facilitate better program management and evaluation. Credible volunteer program data will assist in accounting for expenditures and with program and funding justification. Just as important is the capability to monitor individual volunteer performance, know who has a history of successful fulfillment of volunteer job requirements and recognize which volunteers are qualified to respond to new needs as they are identified. Detailed records make possible better volunteer-clientele "matches".

Volunteer leaders have a responsibilty to create more diverse, challenging volunteer opportunities and to advocate for the needs and rights of volunteers. This means helping volunteers to recognize their own skills and growth potential through career planning, training experiences and involvement in decision-making. It may also mean teaching volunteers how to transfer their experience and knowledge into the language of the business or educational communities. The volunteer leader's advocacy role extends beyond the volunteer program itself, to interaction with potential employers of volunteers and representatives of academic institutions evaluating competencies of volunteers.

Now the pressure is on employers and higher education institutions to give credit for volunteer experience. Volunteer leaders must be prepared to advocate assertively for credit for volunteer experience as it relates to qualifications. Point out to employers and representatives of academic institutions that they can support citizen participation and thereby improve the quality of life by recognizing skills and knowlege acquired through volunteer work. Encourage them to look for significant learning and competence which comes from carefully designed volunteer experience. Ask them to distinquish the volunteers who have focused their time and effort in a few significant areas in order to achieve results, from those whose services are shallow and fragmented. Motivate them to think functionally, instead of by title or position. For example, they might consider "how" a person did a job as well as "what" he/she did.

Similar questions can be used to evaluate volunteer experience as well as a paid work history. Some of these questions are:

* How many hours per week did the volunteer work?
* What were his/her responsibilities?

* What skills and knowledge were utilized?
* What was the method of volunteer supervision and evaluation?
* In what training did the volunteer participate?
* What did the volunteer accomplish?

Emphasize that volunteers are generally self-starters, highly motivated, dependable and people oriented. It is usually more cost-effective to train a generalist in technical areas than it is to teach a technical expert how to relate well with people. Volunteers know the community well, have many contacts and have a well developed sense of public relations. Reenforce the idea that well-chosen volunteer placements can help a current employee expand skills, develop new competencies, or provide opportunities to function in new roles which lead to improved job performance or the chance for advancement.

Volunteer leaders and agency representatives will be called upon by employers and academic institutions to provide verification of volunteer experience and volunteer performance evaluations. It is incumbent upon individuals who are providing references for volunteers, to offer accurate and reliable information. This will enhance respect for the volunteer community and strengthen reliance upon references from volunteer leaders and supervisors. Be aware of data privacy and internal personnel policies which relate to releasing information from employee/volunteer files. Obtain permission in writing from the volunteer prior to releasing evaluative or other data which is not considered to be public information.

In order to provide the best possible support to vounteers, it is necessary to carry out the following tasks:

* Maintain time records for volunteers which specify the date and hours volunteered and types of work performed.
* Develop volunteer job descriptions with well defined responsibilities and tasks, as well as performance standards.
* Establish a supervisory plan for each volunteer, including clear lines of communication and supervision.
* Determine methods for creating individual training plans and keep records of sessions in which volunteers participate along with learning outcomes of those sessions.
* Identify and implement a schedule for volunteer performance evaluation and provide written job appraisals.

* Offer an exit interview when volunteers discontinue service, in order to communicate about job performance, skills and achievements.
* Provide letters of reference for volunteers, which are factual and written according to the same standards as applied to references for paid staff.

Sample volunteer recordkeeping forms are available through a number of resource organizations serving the volunteer community including the Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services and Voluntary Action Centers.

There has been discussion in the volunteer community about whose responsibility it is to maintain volunteer records. For the previously described reasons, it is strongly recommended that organizations maintain volunteer records in their own files. In situations where this is not possible, volunteers will want to keep their own records with verifying signatures from organizational representatives. Whether or not the organization has a master file, it makes sense for volunteers to keep track of their own histories and retain copies of materials from the organization's files. This is particularly important since many volunteers donate services for more than one organization, or move on to responsibilities at other settings over a period of time.

To summarize, there are many reasons for documenting volunteer experience which directly benefit both volunteers and organizations. Increasing competition for volunteers places more pressure on organizations to develop detailed recordkeeping systems and be sensitive to the support needs of volunteers. These recordkeeping systems enhance organizational efficiency in the delivery of volunteer services. It is the responsibility of leaders and supervisors of volunteers to be advocates, both within and beyond their own organization, to educate others about the benefits of volunteer experience.

DOCUMENTING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
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A study to identify the competencies that women acquire from their volunteer work and homemaking experiences and to develop materials that would be helpful to women and to colleges in evaluating these experiences. Includes steps for awarding credit for women's prior learning from volunteer work and homemaking and developing "I Can" lists. 23 p.

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HELPING VOLUNTEERS ENTER THE JOB MARKET. Ekstrom, Ruth B., Educational Testing Service, New Jersey, August, 1978. 7000.02 EKS
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HOW TO GET COLLEGE CREDIT FOR WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED AS A HOMEMAKER AND VOLUNTEER. Ekstrom, Ruth B.; Harris, Abigail M.; Lockheed, Marlaine E.; Educational Testing Service, New Jersey, 1977. 7000.03 EKS
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MINNESOTA OFFICE ON VOLUNTEER SERVICES, SPECIAL PROJECT SUMMARY, EMPLOYMENT CREDIT FOR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE, Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services, Minnesota, April, 1977. HANDOUT
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PERSONAL CAREER PORTFOLIO. National Council of Jewish Women, 1977. 1090.01 Nat
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Publication explains how local government personnel offices can make a commitment to the crediting of volunteer service; relating volunteer service to the meeting of minimum job qualifications; and weighing volunteer service when screening final job candidates. 23 p.

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Workbook offers project HAVE skills and ways to use them in job-finding; matching skills to jobs; finding where the jobs are; preparing a resume; and preparing for interviews. 243 p.

PROOF POSITIVE: DEVELOPING SIGNIFICANT VOLUNTEER RECORDKEEPING SYSTEMS. Ellis, Susan J.; Noyes, Katherine H., Energize, Philadelphia, PA, 1980. 1090.01 Ell
Publication explains the importance of keeping a good recordkeeping system and ways to complete the system. It also provides assistance with discussions such as form, color, and design and offers guidelines for forms use. 48 p.

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RESUME PREPARATION MANUAL: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR WOMEN. Catalyst, New York, 1976. 7000.01 Cat
A manual for preparing resumes including practical exercises and sample cover letters. 58 p.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE PORTFOLIO. Indiana: Children's Museum and Junior League of Indianapolis. 7000.02 Exp
This portfolio was developed to help volunteers recognize and identify skills and strengths,to serve as a catalyst for setting personal goals and to provide the framework for recording valuable work experience. - 14 pages.

NOTE: This is a partial listing of M.O.V.S. Resource Library materials on the subject of documenting volunteer experience. Additional materials will be added to the library on an on-going or other basis. To borrow these amaterials for a three week time period, write to Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services, 500 Rice Street, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55155; or call (612) 296-4731 (metro) or (800) 652-9747 (non-metro Minnesota).